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AUTHOR Boyer, Susan P.; Sedlacek, William E.
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ABSTRACT

While research has suggested numerous problems and adjustment difficulties faced by international students attending colleges and universities in the United States, cultural differences may be barriers for international students in their seeking and receiving help for such problems. This study was conducted to examine whether certain noncognitive variables, shown previously to be predictive of academic success for international students, were predictive of whether international students used counseling services at a university counseling center. Freshman international students (N=230) completed the Noncognitive Questionnaire during an orientation data collection session. Students' responses were compared with their use of counseling center services over the next eight semesters. The results revealed three noncognitive variables which significantly ($p < .05$) predicted counseling center use: understanding and ability to deal with racism; nontraditional ways of acquiring knowledge; and preference for long-term goals over short-term, immediate needs. These findings have implications for designing outreach and counseling services for international students. (Author/NB)

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NONCOGNITIVE PREDICTORS OF COUNSELING CENTER USE BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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SUMMARY

Subjects were freshmen international students (N=230) attending a required orientation program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Results indicated that the noncognitive variables, shown previously to be predictive of academic success for international students, also predicted their utilization of counseling center services.

The three noncognitive variables that significantly ($p < .05$) predicted counseling center use were: understanding and ability to deal with racism, nontraditional ways of acquiring knowledge, and preference for long-term goals over short-term, immediate needs.

Implications for designing outreach and counseling services for international students are discussed.

There is a sizable body of research concerning the problems and adjustment difficulties faced by international students attending colleges and universities in the United States. It has been suggested that, in addition to the developmental challenges faced by all college students, which include making new friends, living away from home and becoming autonomous (Chickering, 1969; Walton, 1968), international students must become acclimated to living abroad for an extended period of time (Brein & David, 1971). Their difficulties are exacerbated by the stress of adapting to a new culture (Church, 1982; Nickelly, Sugita, & Otis, 1964; Zunin & Rubin, 1967). As a result of their cultural differences, international students experience more adjustment problems than do U. S. students (Alexander, Workneh, Klein & Miller, 1976; Dillard & Chisholm, 1983; Hull, 1978).

Cultural differences may become barriers for international students in their seeking and receiving help with adjustment problems (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, in press; Sue, 1981; Torrey, Van Rheenan & Katchadourian, 1970). International students are generally reluctant to initiate a counseling relationship (Sue & Sue, 1977). When they do obtain help, it is more often from a medical rather than psychological service (Alexander et al., 1976). The hesitancy of international students from many cultures to utilize psychological services and their tendency to experience psychological difficulties in physical terms

has been documented in a number of studies (Alexander et al., 1976; Arkoff, Thaver, & Elkind, 1966; Nickelly et al,, 1964; Vontress, 1969). Their reluctance to use professional psychological services may be due to less availability of mental health services in their home countries, as well as to greater reliance on extended family, friends and social networks for problem solving and emotional support (Alexander et al., 1976; Brammer, 1978) . Also, there may be a stigma associated with needing formal counseling, the use of which may result in decreased status and fear of being sent home as a failure (Higginbotham, 1979).

Included in the literature are studies which have examined international college students' expectancies about counseling (Ka-Wai Yuen & Tinsley, 1981), attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982) and help-seeking preferences (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). Still, little is known about the characteristics of international students that are predictive of their actual help seeking behavior from college or university counseling services. While several studies have examined differences between client and non-client college students (Berdie & Stein, 1966; Meadows & Oelke, 1968; Mendelsohn & Kirk, 1962; Sedlacek, Walters & Valente, 1985), the majority of the subjects in these studies were U. S. White students and the results were inconclusive (Arbona, Sedlacek & Carstens, 1987).

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) identified seven noncognitive

variables that have been found to be related to student academic success. They are: (1) positive self-concept, (2) realistic self-appraisal, (3) understanding and ability to deal with racism, (4) preference for long-term goals over short-term, immediate needs, (5) availability of a strong support person, (6) successful leadership experience, and (7) demonstrated community service. Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) devised the Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to measure the seven variables proposed by Sedlacek and Brooks, and added "nontraditional ways of acquiring knowledge" as an eighth variable.

The NCQ has been found to be predictive of academic success with U. S. students. The NCQ was predictive of college GPA for U. S. Black and White students, of persistence in college for Black students (Tracey and Sedlacek 1984, 1985), and of graduation from college for Black and White students (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). The NCQ has also been shown to be predictive of college GPA and persistence for U. S. specially-admitted students (White & Sedlacek, 1986). The noncognitive variables also successfully predicted college grades and persistence for international students (Boyer & Sedlacek, in press).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether the noncognitive variables, identified by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984), were predictive of whether international students utilize counseling services at a university counseling center. Recently, Arbona, Sedlacek and Carstens

(1987) found the NCQ to be predictive of counseling center use for U. S. Black and White college students. In general, prior to this, researchers have not attempted to use a single set of variables that relate both to academic success and the use of counseling services. This is an important area of investigation since utilization of counseling services has been found to be related to successful retention programs (Bishop & Brenneman, 1986; Blanc, DeBuhr, & Martin, 1983; Churchill & Iwai, 1981). Frank and Kirk (1975) reported that students who received counseling services have been shown to graduate at a higher rate and were less likely to drop out with poor academic standing than those who did not use such services. Determining whether variables predictive of retention predict counseling center use might shed light on the relationship between academic achievement and help-seeking behavior. This information may also be useful in designing outreach and counseling services for international students who need professional assistance to remain in school, but who are reluctant to come in for counseling.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Subjects were freshmen international students (N=230) attending summer orientation at a large, eastern, state university. Sixty-nine percent were male and 31% were female. Students indicated that they were from the following geographic regions: Asia or Southeast Asia (39%), Latin America (15%), Africa (15%), Middle East (11%), and other

(20%). One-third were immigrants, while two-thirds were nonimmigrants.

The Noncognitivie Questionnaire (NCQ) was completed during an orientation data collection session and was compared with students' use of counseling center services anytime over the next eight semesters.

Instrument

The NCQ is a 23 item questionnaire containing 18 Likert-type items on college expectations and on self-assessment, 2 categorical items on educational aspirations, and 3 open-ended items requesting information on present goals, past accomplishments, and other activities. Two-week test-retest reliabilities ranged from .70 to .94 for each item, with a median value of .85 (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984). Support for the NCQ's construct validity was found using factor analysis (Tracey and Sedlacek, 1984).

Analyses

Stepwise discriminant function analysis was utilized to determine whether the noncognitive variables differentiated students who utilized counseling center services from those who did not use counseling center services.

Results

Thirteen percent of the international students used counseling center services, while 87% did not. Of those that came to the counseling center, 64% used the counseling service, 25% used the learning assistance service, and 11% came in for other reasons.

Three noncognitive variables significantly predicted counseling center use ($p < .05$). These variables were understanding and ability to deal with racism, nontraditional ways of acquiring knowledge, and preference for long-term goals over short-term, immediate needs. The standardized beta weights for the above variables were .61, .44, and .56, respectively. The canonical correlation coefficient for the above variables in predicting utilization of counseling center services was .19.

When the above mentioned noncognitive variables were used to predict counseling center utilization, they successfully predicted counseling center use and nonuse in 65% of the cases.

Discussion

Three of the eight noncognitive variables successfully predicted counseling center use for international students. These variables were: understanding and ability to deal with racism, nontraditional ways of acquiring knowledge, and preference for long-term goals over short-term, immediate needs. These variables have also been shown to be predictive of academic success, especially persistence in school (Boyer & Sedlacek, in press). It is not surprising that variables that were shown to be predictive of college grades and retention were also predictive of counseling center use. According to Tinto (1975), students who become integrated into both the academic and social domains of college are more likely to remain in school. Utilizing counseling center

services, which include personal and vocational counseling and learning assistance services, may be seen as both an indication of and a contribution toward this integration.

It is important to consider why these characteristics were predictive of counseling center use. A person who scores high in understanding racism is aware of the role of the "system" in his or her life, how it treats nonmajority persons, often unintentionally, and has developed ways of coping with it. One way an international student can obtain help with adjusting to the new "university system" is through seeking counseling services, whether it be through personal counseling, vocational counseling or counseling to help them to study more efficiently. An individual who prefers long-range goals has patience and can set goals and proceed for some time without reinforcement. In addition, an individual high in long-range goals is able to plan in academic and non-academic areas. Seeking counseling might indicate the ability of an individual to be planful in his or her life and it can help individuals to explore and work toward long-term goals. In addition, while counseling has the potential to be an enlightening, growthful experience, the process can at times be uncomfortable or painful, since one must explore and confront aspects of oneself that impedes effective living. If an individual can endure the discomfort, the long-term payoff is often quite worthwhile. Therefore, the likelihood of having a successful counseling experience is somewhat contingent on the ability to defer immediate gratification

for long-term gains. An individual who scores high on the variable, knowledge acquired in a field, has developed innovative ways of acquiring information about a given subject or field. Speaking to a counselor is another way of learning about oneself or one's environment.

The present study has important implications for designing outreach and counseling services for international students. Incoming international students should be provided with an introduction to counseling services and staff. Information about the purpose, facilities, personnel and the actual counseling process should be conveyed to all incoming international students (Ka-Wai Yuen & Tinsley, 1981). International students could be effectively reached during their initial orientation to their univeristy, through organizations and groups in which they participate, or through their international student center.

International students could be taught by peer counselors, their academic advisors, international student advisors, or through workshops, how to be more effective within the "university system". The ability to delay gratification in pursuit of long-term goals is an essential ingredient to success for any college student, given the numerous demands of the academic curricula. This is especially true for international students, since they are likely to experience more adjustment problems than U. S. students because of cultural differences (Alexander et al., 1976; Dillard & Chisholm, 1983). Conveying that the

adjustment takes time and is difficult for other students as well, and arranging for international students to speak with more advanced students who have made the adjustment, may help incoming international students persevere in the short-run. Students can be shown how to obtain information and support by utilizing the various resources available to them on campus. Providing incoming international students with these support services could serve to make their educational experience more successful and rewarding. Westbrook and Sedlacek (in press) provided evidence that counselors can be taught to use the noncognitive variables in a workshop format.

Several additional studies in this area are suggested by the present study. First, it may be useful to examine differences in the predictive ability of the noncognitive variables, by students' geographic region or country of origin, with a larger sample. Since differences in attitudes toward counseling (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982) and counseling expectations (Ka-Wai Yuen & Tinsley, 1981) were found among students coming from various geographic regions and countries, this information could be particularly important. Second, the eight noncognitive variables may have differential predictive ability across the eight semesters studied. Other studies using the noncognitive variables (Arbona, Sedlacek, & Carstens, 1987; Boyer & Sedlacek, in press; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985, 1987; White & Sedlacek, 1986) have found that the variables and the strength of the

variables differed by semester. This is also important given the various stage models of sojourner adjustment that are discussed in the literature (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960). Third, it may be interesting to determine whether the variables predicted length of time students spent in counseling. Given the research of Sue and his associates (Sue, & McKinney, 1975; Sue, McKinney, Allen & Hall, 1974), which found that minority clients terminated counseling after the first session, at a rate of approximately 50 percent, knowing the length of time spent in counseling seems crucial. Finally, it may be useful to explore whether the order and strength of the noncognitive variables, as predictors, varied by particular counseling service utilized. Additional studies with larger samples would add to the present study to determine the answers to these important questions.

In summary, the current study has demonstrated that noncognitive variables, associated with academic success of international students, are also associated with their utilization of counseling services. Counselors should be able to use these variables to design outreach and counseling services to increase the chances that international students will have a successful higher educational experience.

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